

# Texas Law Help 2.0 and the Self-Represented Litigants Project

Presentation By: Elliott F. Fontenette

# What is the Self-Represented Litigants Project?

- \* The Self-Represented Litigants Project is a project of the Texas Legal Services Center with the goal of providing legal assistance to self-represented litigants.
- \* **Staff**
  - \* **Managing Attorney:** Paula Pierce
  - \* **Primary Staff Attorney :** Elliott Fontenette
  - \* **Part- Time Staff Attorney :** Melissa Deutsch
  - \* **Media Producer :** Colton Lawrence

# The Problem We Face:

- \* Currently, a **substantial** number of Texans cannot afford an attorney, and due to high demand they are also not able to obtain assistance from Legal Aid.
- \* This leads them to some of them going through the legal system as self-represented litigants.

# Project Goals

- \* Expand and Increase assistance to BCLS eligible self-represented Litigants through:
  - \* Live Chat
  - \* Self Help Videos
  - \* Interactive Interviews

# A Brief History

- \* The project started in **January of 2010** as a pilot program to assist self-represented litigants in Texas, and was funded by a grant from the **Texas Access to Justice Foundation**.
- \* Live Chat went online in May of 2010, a self help video was produced, and Interactive Interviews were put online.
- \* The project has been **successful**, continues to grow, and is now funded through general state support funds from the Texas Legal Services Center.

# How We Help: Live Chat

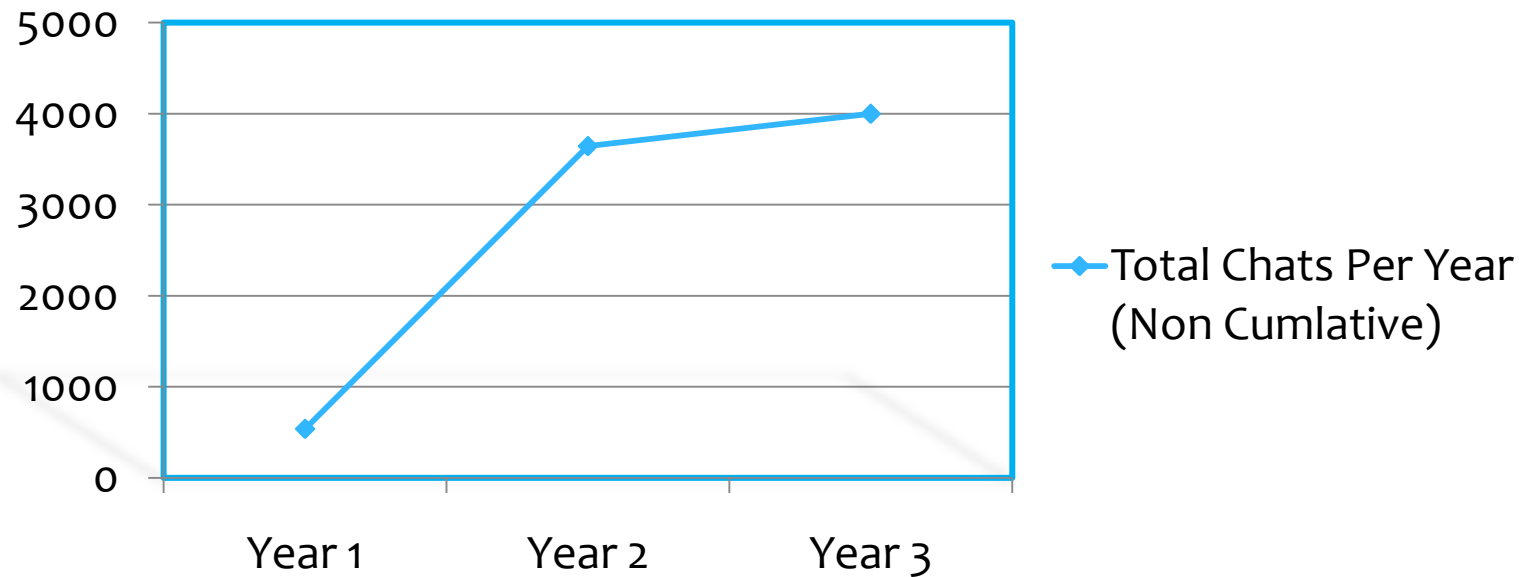
- \* Live Chat allows self-represented litigants to:
  - \* Find information and resources on [www.texaslawhelp.org](http://www.texaslawhelp.org).
  - \* Use Interactive Interviews.
  - \* Get individualized legal advice and brief services from licensed attorneys.
    - \* This is provided on a **case by case basis**.

# Live Chat: Statistics

- \* **Year 1:** May 2010 – End of Dec 2010 : 538 total chats
- \* **Year 2:** Jan 2011 – End of Dec 2011: 3,645 total chats
- \* **Current year to date :** 3,221
  - \* End of year projection: At least 3,900 to 4,000 total chats for the year.
- \* Since launch we have handled approximately **7,404 total chats.**

# Live Chat: Graphing the Demand

**Total Chats Per Year (Non Cumulative)**



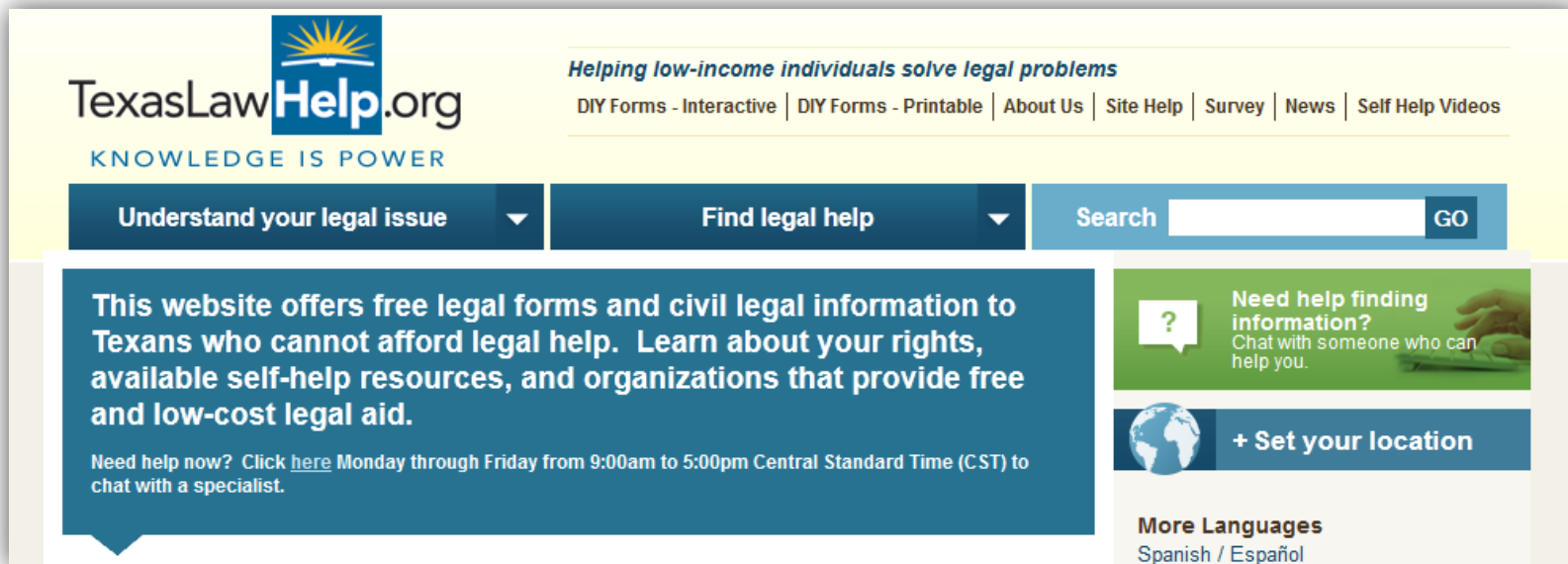


# Live Chat: Clients

- \* Currently a large percentage of chatters will qualify for one on one legal advice from our service.
  - \* **HOWEVER:** Even if they don't qualify, while we do not provide legal advice, we will **generally** try to help them with at least general information and places they can contact for more help.
- \* Clients **must** be:
  - \* Texas Residents
  - \* At 125% or below of the Federal Poverty Line
    - \* Measured by Gross Monthly Income vs. Household Size.
  - \* **Not** seeking help on criminal law or personal injury Issues, be a business, and/or not be subject to a conflict of interest.

# Live Chat: When and Where?

- \* Live Chat is online **Monday through Friday from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM** on [www.texaslawhelp.org](http://www.texaslawhelp.org).
- \* If the chat service is online the following **green** button will be displayed:



The screenshot shows the TexasLawHelp.org website. The header includes the logo, the tagline "KNOWLEDGE IS POWER", and navigation links: "Helping low-income individuals solve legal problems", "DIY Forms - Interactive", "DIY Forms - Printable", "About Us", "Site Help", "Survey", "News", and "Self Help Videos". Below the header is a navigation bar with "Understand your legal issue" and "Find legal help" dropdown menus, a search bar with a "GO" button, and a large blue box with text about free legal forms and civil legal information. To the right of the blue box is a green button with a question mark icon and the text "Need help finding information? Chat with someone who can help you." Below this button is a globe icon and a "+ Set your location" button. At the bottom right, there is a "More Languages" section with "Spanish / Español". A large green star is positioned to the right of the website screenshot.

**TexasLawHelp.org**  
KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

Helping low-income individuals solve legal problems

DIY Forms - Interactive | DIY Forms - Printable | About Us | Site Help | Survey | News | Self Help Videos

Understand your legal issue Find legal help Search GO

This website offers free legal forms and civil legal information to Texans who cannot afford legal help. Learn about your rights, available self-help resources, and organizations that provide free and low-cost legal aid.

Need help now? Click [here](#) Monday through Friday from 9:00am to 5:00pm Central Standard Time (CST) to chat with a specialist.

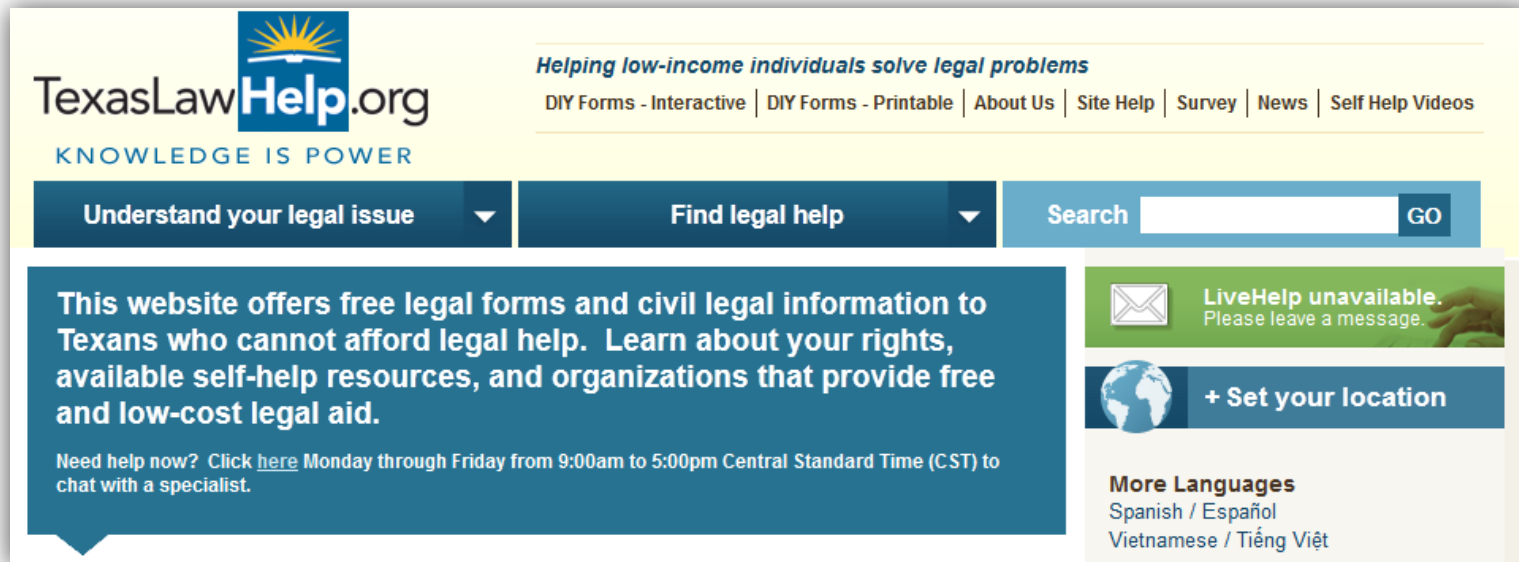
Need help finding information? Chat with someone who can help you.

+ Set your location

More Languages  
Spanish / Español

# Live Chat: Offline

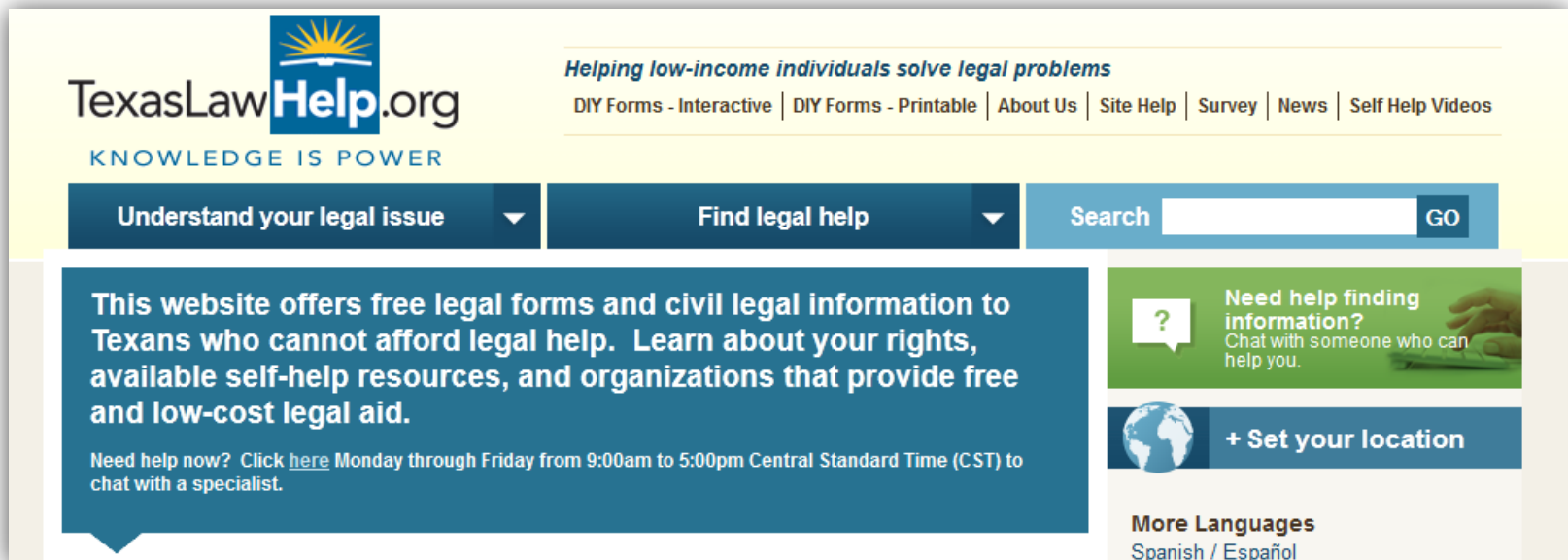
- \* When Live Chat is not online, visitors can leave a message which we respond to as fast as we can.
- \* The message goes to e-mail, and we respond by e-mail and go from there.
- \* The **green** button for when it is not online is below:



The screenshot shows the TexasLawHelp.org website. The header includes the logo, the tagline 'KNOWLEDGE IS POWER', and a navigation menu with links: 'DIY Forms - Interactive', 'DIY Forms - Printable', 'About Us', 'Site Help', 'Survey', 'News', and 'Self Help Videos'. Below the header is a search bar with a 'GO' button. A large blue banner on the left states: 'This website offers free legal forms and civil legal information to Texans who cannot afford legal help. Learn about your rights, available self-help resources, and organizations that provide free and low-cost legal aid. Need help now? Click [here](#) Monday through Friday from 9:00am to 5:00pm Central Standard Time (CST) to chat with a specialist.' On the right, a green button with an envelope icon says 'LiveHelp unavailable. Please leave a message.' Below it is a blue button with a globe icon that says '+ Set your location'. At the bottom right, a section titled 'More Languages' lists 'Spanish / Español' and 'Vietnamese / Tiếng Việt'. A large green star is positioned to the right of the 'LiveHelp unavailable' button.

# Live Chat: Example and Explanation

- \* Jane Doe is looking to get a divorce, can't afford an attorney, and has been turned down by legal aid. She is on [www.texaslawhelp.org](http://www.texaslawhelp.org) but doesn't know where to start and sees the button below:




The screenshot shows the TexasLawHelp.org website. The header includes the logo with a sun icon, the tagline "KNOWLEDGE IS POWER", and a navigation bar with links: "DIY Forms - Interactive", "DIY Forms - Printable", "About Us", "Site Help", "Survey", "News", and "Self Help Videos". Below the header is a navigation bar with three main sections: "Understand your legal issue" (with a dropdown arrow), "Find legal help" (with a dropdown arrow), and a "Search" bar with a "GO" button. A large blue banner on the left states: "This website offers free legal forms and civil legal information to Texans who cannot afford legal help. Learn about your rights, available self-help resources, and organizations that provide free and low-cost legal aid." Below this banner, it says: "Need help now? Click [here](#) Monday through Friday from 9:00am to 5:00pm Central Standard Time (CST) to chat with a specialist." On the right side, there is a green box with a question mark icon and the text: "Need help finding information? Chat with someone who can help you." Below this is a blue box with a globe icon and the text: "+ Set your location". At the bottom right, there is a section for "More Languages" with the option "Spanish / Español". A large green star is positioned to the right of the website screenshot.

# Live Chat: Example Contd.

Chat Window - Mozilla Firefox

https://server.iad.liveperson.net/hc/7945526/?cmd=file&file=visitorWantsToChat&site=7945526&SESSIONVAR!skill=Help using the web

Live Chat by  LIVEPERSON

Welcome to LiveHelp. We have two chat services available for Texas residents: general website assistance to locate legal information and information on disaster relief.

LiveHelp Operators primarily provide legal information that you may review, and information on other legal organizations you may contact for further legal assistance.

**Disclaimer and Terms of Use:** Use of the LiveHelp service does NOT create an attorney-client relationship. By using LiveHelp, you agree that any information/advice you may receive is the full extent of this service and that your receiving this information/advice does NOT create an attorney client relationship. Further, by using LiveHelp you agree to waive and release any rights you may have for a claim based upon the information provided through this service.

**Please note:** LiveHelp is a grant-funded program to assist low-income Texans with civil legal needs. Our attorneys are licensed in the state of Texas and cannot provide information to residents of any other state. This chat feature is available for civil legal issues only. We do not provide legal information on criminal issues.

**Please note:** We can only provide information directly to the person with the legal issue, not a third party.

Some of the information that may be provided to you in the chat will require that you to have the latest version of Adobe Reader.

Would you like help with using the website or disaster relief? \*

Select One ▼


Email Address -- Note: Your email is not mandatory, but providing it will allow us to contact you in the event our chat becomes interrupted.

Required items indicated with \*.

Start Chat

**Hello**

How may I help you?

This live chat is  
  
TESTED 08-OCT

# Live Chat: Example Contd.

Chat Window - Mozilla Firefox

https://server.iad.liveperson.net/hc/7945526/?cmd=file&file=visitorWantsToChat&site=7945526&SESSIO

Live Chat by **LIVEPERSON**

Please note: Livenelp is a grant-funded program to assist low-income Texans with civil legal needs. Our attorneys are licensed in the state of Texas and cannot provide information to residents of any other state. This chat feature is available for civil legal issues only. We do not provide legal information on criminal issues.

Please note: We can only provide information directly to the person with the legal issue, not a third party.

Some of the information that may be provided to you in the chat will require that you to have the latest version of Adobe Reader.

Would you like help with using the website or disaster relief? \*

Help using the website

This service is funded by a grant that requires we collect statistical information. Please answer the following brief questions. What is your HOUSEHOLD average monthly income? \*

\$1150-1550

How many people live in your house? \*

2

What county do you live in? \*

Lubbock

What is your name? \*

Jane Doe

Email Address -- Note: Your email is not mandatory, but providing it will allow us to contact you in the event our chat becomes interrupted.

JaneDoe123@gmail.com

Required items indicated with \*.

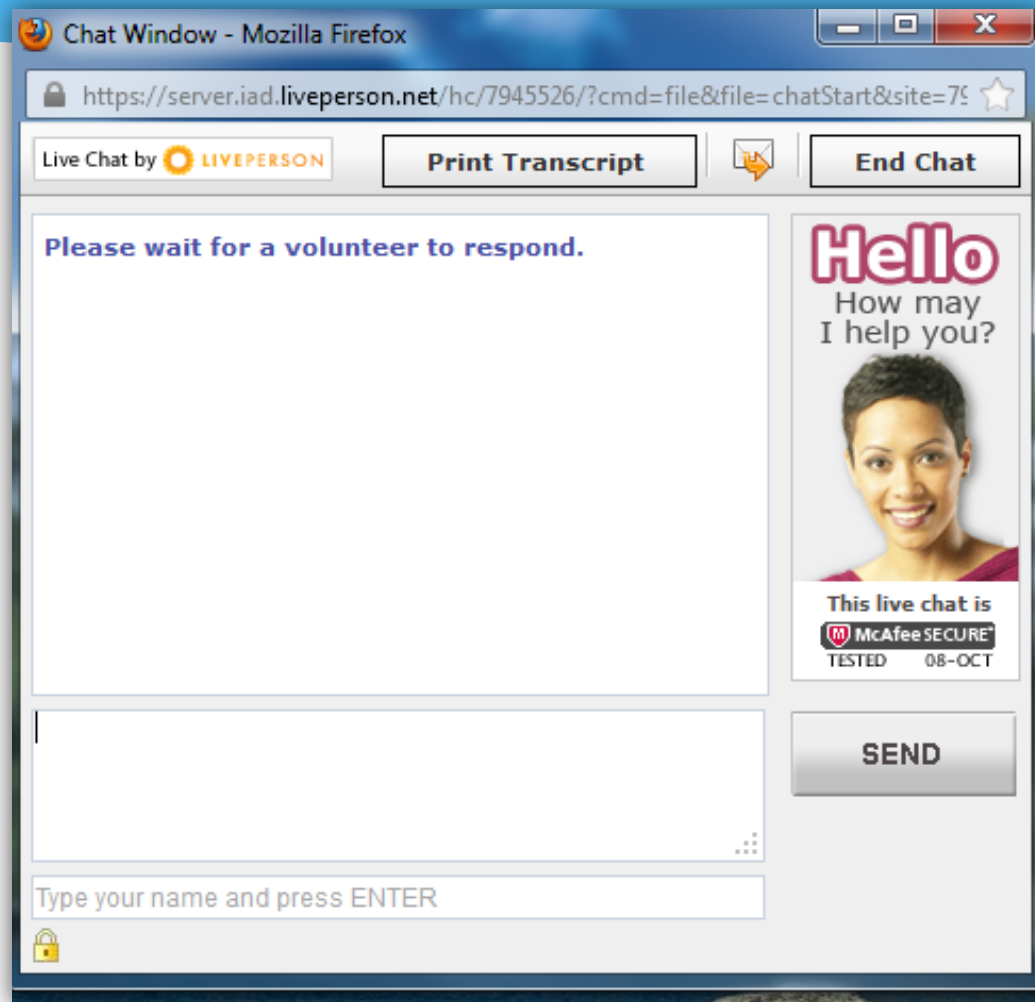
Start Chat

Hello

How may I help you?

This live chat is  
McAfee SECURE  
08-OCT

# Live Chat: Example Contd.



# Live Chat: Example Contd.

The screenshot shows a live chat window with the following components:

- Header:** Name: Jane Doe, Ticket ID: , Subject:
- Toolbar:** Chat, Transfer, Stop Chat, History, Push Page, Send HTML, Desktop Sharing.
- Chat Area:** Contains a green system message and a blue user message. A blue arrow points to this area.
- Visitor Info Panel:** Displays contact details. A blue arrow points to this panel.
- Status Bar:** Shows a green checkmark, a progress bar, and the text LP-7945526 Elliott. A blue arrow points to this bar.

**Chat History:**

**info:** Please wait for a volunteer to respond.

**Elliott:** Hi, how may I help you?

**Visitor Info:**

Contact ID	Jane Doe
Contact Email	JaneDoe123@gmail.com
Country	United States
City	Austin
Organization	Texas Department of Information Resources
ISP	Texas Department of Information Resources
Operating System	Windows 7
Time Zone	America/Chicago
IP	168.39.26.66
Host	mail.tlsc.org
State/Province	Texas

**Campaign:**

Medium	Direct
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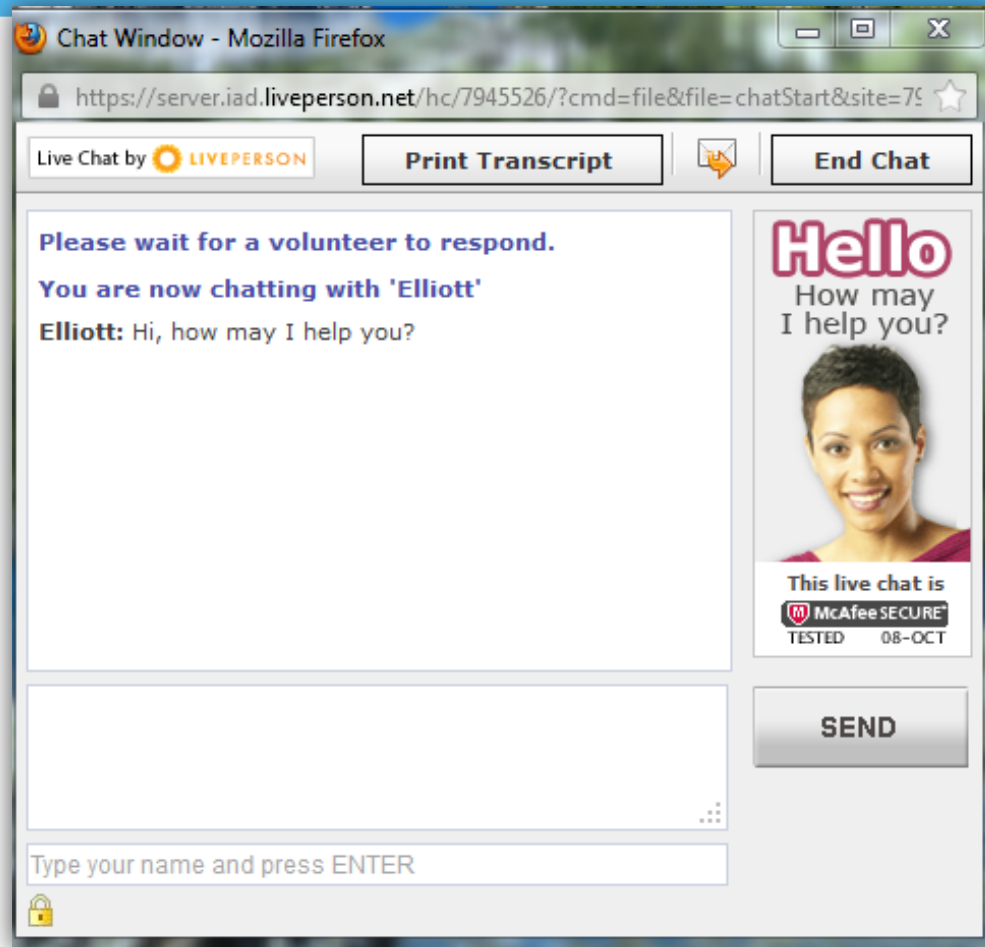
**Session Info:**

State	Chatting
Skill	Help using the website
Agent	Elliott

**Status Bar:** LP-7945526 Elliott



# Live Chat: Example Contd.



# Live Chat: Example Contd.

- \* From there I would:
  - \* Verify qualifying information.
  - \* If she qualifies, run a conflict of interest check in our case management system.
  - \* Determine and provide the appropriate level of service which could be:
    - \* Legal Information
    - \* Legal Advice
    - \* Forms
    - \* Or other service.

# Live Chat: Distance and Language

- \* **Language Access**

- \* We currently have Live Chat staffed with an attorney who is fluent in Spanish.
- \* Also, we have an interpreter service, which allows us to provide service to almost anyone, **regardless of language**, if they qualify.
- \* We use Google translate to get the potential client's phone number, and then call with the interpreter.

- \* **Distance Access**

- \* Live Chat is especially useful for those counties without a brick and mortar legal aid office or law library.
- \* Especially helpful in pointing to online resources.


# Self-Help Videos

- \* Another way we help self-represented litigants is through the use and development of self-help videos.
- \* The self-help videos break down complicated legal concepts into easy to understand principles and step by step processes.
- \* Users are more likely to watch a short video than read a long pamphlet.

# Self-Help Videos: The Legal System Helping Yourself

- \* In conjunction with Travis County Television, and the Lubbock County Bar Association we produced the video the Legal System: Doing it Yourself.
- \* It is a general guide to going through the legal system on your own and is available now on [www.texaslawhelp.org](http://www.texaslawhelp.org).
- \* It is available in English and in Spanish with subtitles.

# Self-Help Videos: The Legal System Helping Yourself



**TexasLawHelp.org**  
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Helping low-income individuals solve legal problems

DIY Forms - Interactive | DIY Forms - Printable | About Us | Site Help | Survey | News | Self Help Videos

Understand your legal issueFind legal helpSearchGO

HOME

SHAREEMAILPRINT

## New Video Helps Low-Income Texans Navigate the Court System

Authored By: Texas Legal Services Center

### Information



New Video Helps Low-Income Texans Navig... Like Share More info

04:21 / 11:27

LUBBOCK, TX - The Lubbock County Bar Association and Texas Legal Services Center today released *The Legal System: Helping Yourself*, a nine minute self-help video that prepares a pro-se (or self-represented) litigant on what to expect when going to civil court.

The video is available for viewing through the popular website TexasLawHelp.org, which is dedicated to providing free, reliable legal information to those who cannot afford legal help or qualify for legal aid.

"*The Legal System: Helping Yourself* premieres at a crucial time for low-income Texans who need civil legal assistance," said Judge Judy Parker, Presiding Judge, Lubbock County Court at Law 3, who is featured in the video. "This is a valuable resource for Texans who face the daunting prospect of going to court without an attorney."

Judge Parker points out that according to the American Bar Association, due to a lack of resources, only about 20 to 25 percent of the civil legal needs of low-income and poor Texans are being met.

**Need help finding information?**  
Chat with someone who can help you.

**+ Set your location**

**More Languages**  
Spanish / Español  
Vietnamese / Tiếng Việt

**Texas Civil Courts Guide**  
The Texas Civil Courts program is designed to help you find the proper court to file a case in civil, consumer, family, injury, probate, and property matters.  
Search the Guide.

**News**  
**Own the Dream**  
Use this online tool to help you determine if you are eligible for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals.  
**Free Interactive Protective Order Kit is Available Now**  
The easy-to-use "interview" will guide you through the process to apply for a Protective Order.  
**New Video Helps Low-Income Texans Navigate the Court System**  
Just released!

# Self-Help Videos: Office of Court Administration

- \* In conjunction with the Texas Office of Court Administration we developed, shot, and are currently in the process of editing a series of videos designed to help self-represented litigants.
- \* There will be 14 videos , at a total running time of 60 minutes.
- \* The videos will be available in English and Spanish **without** subtitles.



# Self-Help Videos: Behind the Scenes Production and Editing






# Interactive Interviews

- \* Interactive Interviews: These are guided question and answer interviews, which assist in filling out the forms.
- \* At each step there are explanations of legal terms, processes, and concepts to enable the user to fill out the forms correctly.
- \* Each interactive interview has been through extensive development by a licensed attorney and beta testing by a group of attorneys and non attorneys.

# Interactive Interviews: Currently Available



**TexasLawHelp.org**  
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Helping low-income individuals solve legal problems

DIY Forms - Interactive | DIY Forms - Printable | About Us | Site Help | Survey | News | Self Help Videos

Understand your legal issue

Find legal help

Search  GO


HOME

SHARE EMAIL PRINT


## Interactive Forms

TexasLawHelp.org now offers online forms -- by clicking on the links below, you will be redirected to LawHelpInteractive.org, where you will take a step by step "interview" that will ask you questions, and you will type in your answers. Once the interview is complete, a legal document will be generated, which you may print off.. These online forms work best in Internet Explorer. Please follow the instructions carefully. We also encourage you to sign up (free) with LawHelpInteractive.org so that you may save your work should you need to exit the interview before it is completed.

- **Protective Order**
- **Affidavit of Inability to Pay**
- **Uncontested Divorce In Texas (with or without children)**



**Need help finding information?**  
Chat with someone who can help you.



**+ Set your location**

**More Languages**  
Spanish / Español  
Vietnamese / Tiếng Việt

**Texas Civil Courts Guide**  
The Texas Civil Courts program is designed to help you find the proper court to file a case in civil, consumer, family, injury, probate, and property matters.  
[Search the Guide.](#)

# Interactive Interviews: Example – Petition For Divorce

Petition for Divorce, with or without Children - Mozilla Firefox

File Edit View History Bookmarks Tools Help

https://lawhelpinteractive.org/groups/TX-Texas/template.2011-05-10.9535182402/get\_interview?session\_id=template.2011-05-10.9535182402-2012-10-09-1349614249787

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INTERACTIVE  
Legal documents made simpler

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BACK NEXT MY PROGRESS 7 Type your name and select your gender AA A

Access To Justice  
AT CHICAGO-KENT COLLEGE OF LAW

Type your name and select your gender.

First: Jane

Middle: Sally

Last: Doe

☐ Male  
☒ Female

Continue

1 BASIC INFORMATION

TexasLawHelp.org  
KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

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# Interactive Interviews: Example – Petition For Divorce

Petition for Divorce, with or without Children - Mozilla Firefox

File Edit View History Bookmarks Tools Help

https://lawhelpinteractive.org/groups/7X-Texas/template.2011-05-10.9535182402/get\_interview?session\_id=template.2011-05-10.9535182402-2012-10-09-1349614249787

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Legal documents made simpler

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BACK NEXT MY PROGRESS 8 What county will the divorce be filed in?

Access To Justice  
AT CHICAGO-KENT COLLEGE OF LAW

What county will the divorce be filed in?

Continue

How do I know?  
Learn More

1 BASIC INFORMATION

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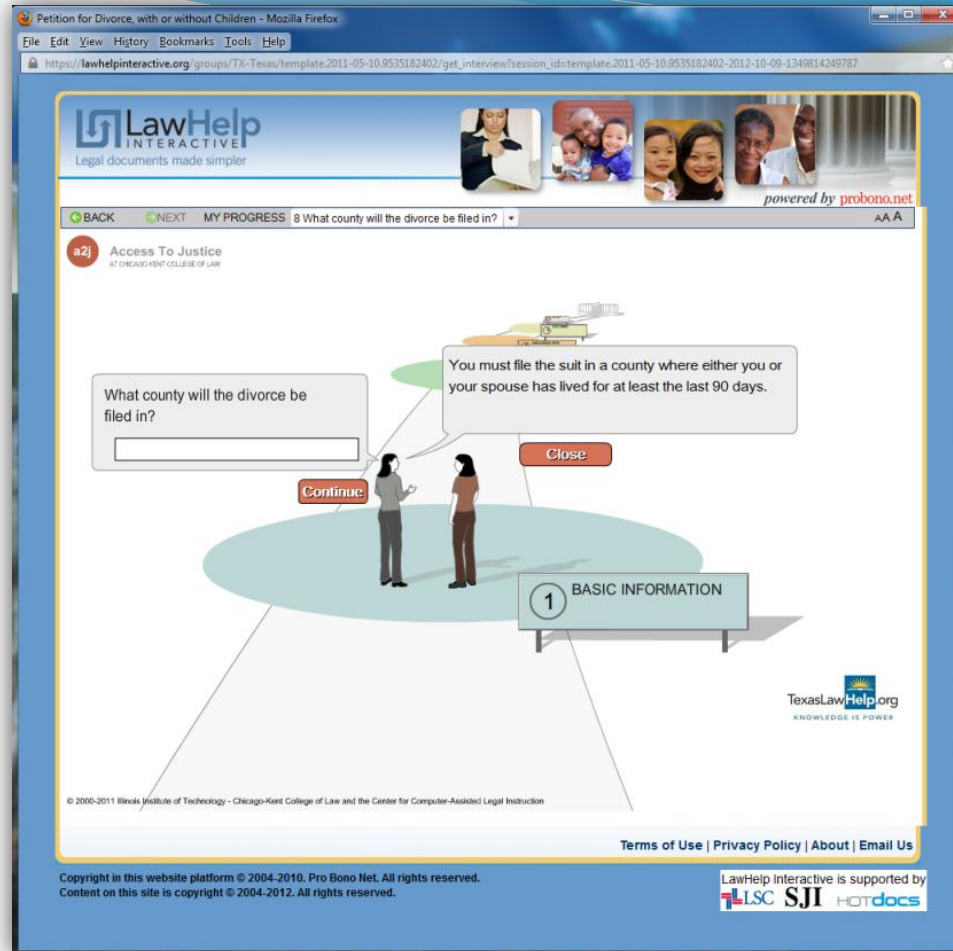
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# Interactive Interviews: Example – Petition For Divorce



CAUSE NO. \_\_\_\_\_

<p><b>IN THE MATTER OF OF THE MARRIAGE OF</b></p> <p><b>Jane Sally Doe</b> Petitioner</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>AND</b></p> <p><b>John James Doe</b> Respondent</p> <p><b>AND IN THE INTEREST OF MINOR CHILDREN:</b></p> <p><b>Sarah Jennifer Doe</b></p>		<p style="text-align: right;"><b>IN THE</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>DISTRICT COURT OF: TRAVIS COUNTY, TEXAS</b></p>
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### PETITION FOR DIVORCE

- PARTIES**
  - Petitioner**
  - 1. My name is: Jane Sally Doe
  - Respondent**
  - 2. My spouse's name is: John James Doe
  - Children**
  - 1. Sarah Jennifer Doe
- DISCOVERY**
  - The discovery level in this case is Level 2
- JURISDICTION**
  - 1. I have lived in this county for the last 90 days.
  - 2. I have lived in Texas for the last six months.
- MARRIAGE and SEPARATION**
  - 1. My spouse and I got married on: August 6, 2007
  - 2. We started living together as spouses on: August 20, 2013
- GROUND(S) FOR DIVORCE**

I want to get divorced for the following reason(s):

  - the marriage has become insupportable due to discord or conflict of personalities that destroys the legitimate ends of the marital relationship and prevents any reasonable expectation of reconciliation. I ask the Court to grant me a divorce because my spouse and I do not get along and do not plan to live together ever again.
- CHILDREN**
  - Pregnancy**

The wife in this marriage is not pregnant.
  - Children of the marriage**

Child's name	Date of Birth	Place of Birth	State where child lives now
Sarah Jennifer Doe	April 4, 2008	Austin, Texas	Texas
- Court Orders involving these children**

There are **NO** court orders in effect now for any of the children listed above.
- Children's Health Insurance**

The children do not have private health insurance in effect.

**Private Health Insurance NOT in effect:**

The children do not receive medical assistance through CHIPS or Medicaid.

Cost of premium: Not Applicable

Health insurance is available to the person who pays child support at a reasonable cost.
- Custody, Visitation, and Child Support**

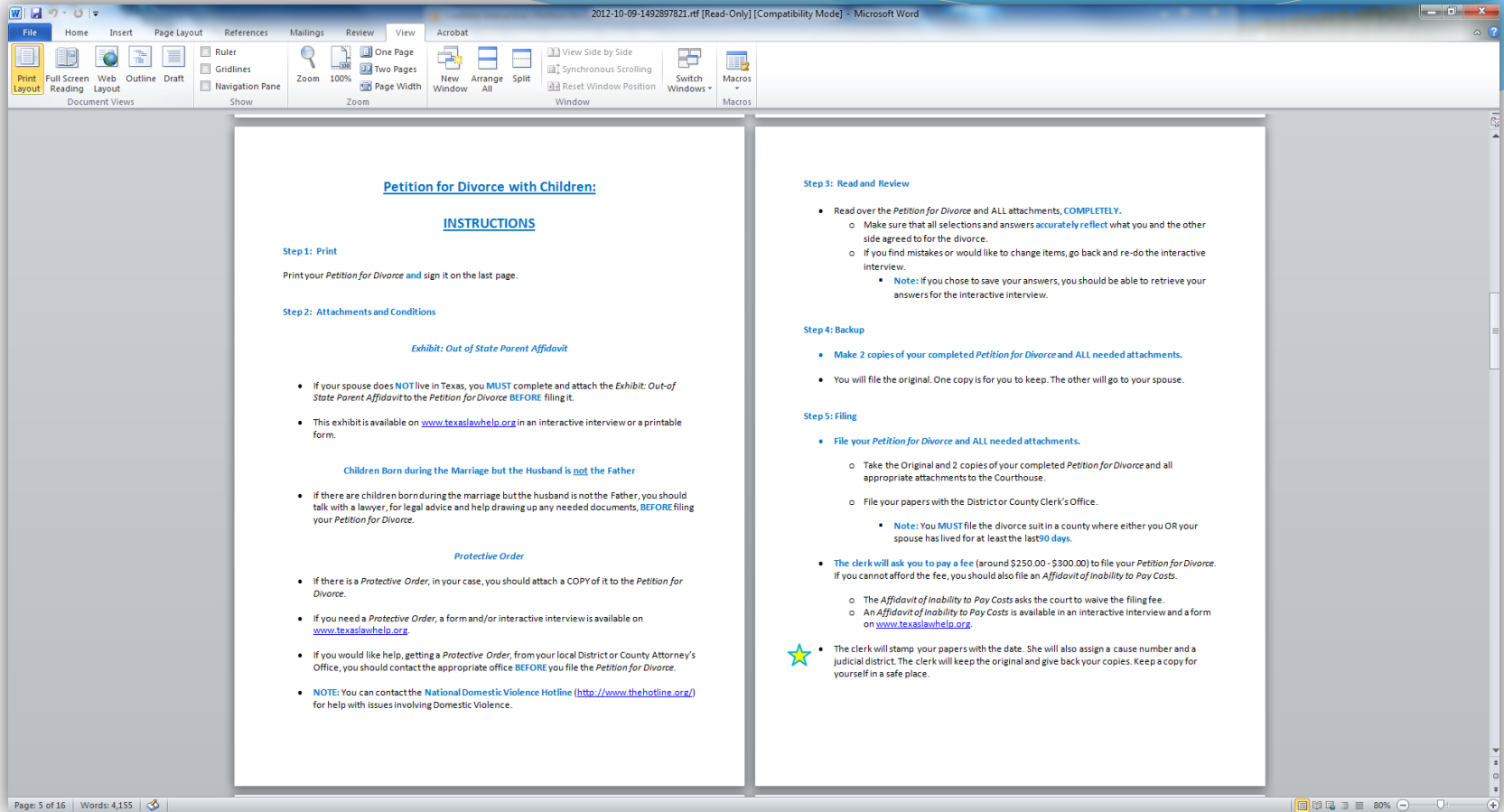
My spouse and I agree to try to make an agreement about custody, visitation, and support. If we cannot make an agreement, I ask the court to make decisions on these issues that are best for our children, including, if applicable, orders for current and retroactive child support and medical support.
- Family Information**

I will fill out and file the *Family Information* form when I file the Final Decree of Divorce, as required by Texas Family Code Section 105.006.
- Children's Property**

None of the children, of this marriage, own any property, other than personal property.
- Children born during the marriage, but husband is not the father**

The wife did not have children with another man while married to the husband.

# Interactive Interviews: Example – Petition For Divorce



# Interactive Interviews: Statistics and Upcoming Interviews

- \* The first Interactive Interviews went online in May of 2010. Since then:
  - \* Use of the interviews has **doubled each** quarter.
  - \* Texas is now #3 in terms of number of interviews , and #4 in terms of how many interviews result in document assembly across the country.
  - \* For Q1 of 2012 **16,987 interviews** were taken, resulting in **8,111 documents** being **assembled in one quarter alone**.
- \* We are currently developing Interactive Interviews for Occupational Driver's Licenses and Expunction in Texas.



# TexasLawHelp 2.0 and the Self-Represented Litigants Project

- \* Thanks for watching and please ask any questions you may have!